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**The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.**

In Four Volumes

**Addison, Joseph**

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-----velut si  
 Egregio inspersos reprehendas corpore nevos. Hor.

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**A**FTER what I have said in my last *Saturday's* paper, I shall enter on the subject of this without farther preface, and remark the several Defects which appear in the Fable, the Characters, the Sentiments, and the Language of *Milton's Paradise Lost*; not doubting but the Reader will pardon me, if I alledge at the same time whatever may be said for the extenuation of such defects. The first imperfection which I shall observe in the Fable is, that the event of it is Unhappy.

The Fable of every Poem is according to *Aristotle's* division either *Simple* or *Implex*. It is called Simple when there is no change of fortune in it; *Implex* when the fortune of the chief Actor changes from bad to good, or from good to bad. The *Implex* Fable is thought the most perfect; I suppose, because it is more proper to stir up the passions of the Reader, and to surprize him with a greater variety of accidents.

The *Implex* Fable is therefore of two kinds: in the first the chief Actor makes his way through a long series of dangers and difficulties, till he arrives at honour and prosperity, as we see in the story of *Ulysses*. In the second, the chief Actor in the Poem falls from some eminent pitch of honour and prosperity, into misery and disgrace. Thus we see *Adam* and *Eve* sinking from a state of innocence and happiness, into the most abject condition of sin and sorrow.

The most taking tragedies among the antients were built on this last sort of *Implex* Fable, particularly the Tragedy of *Oedipus*, which proceeds upon a story, if we may believe *Aristotle*, the most proper for Tragedy that could be invented by the wit of man. I have taken some pains in a former paper to shew, that this kind of *Implex* Fable, wherein the event is unhappy, is more apt to affect an audience than that of the first kind; notwithstanding many excellent pieces among the antients, as well as most

most of those which have been written of late years in our own country, are raised upon contrary plans. I must however own, that I think this kind of Fable, which is the most perfect in Tragedy, is not so proper for an Heroic Poem.

*Milton* seems to have been sensible of this imperfection in his Fable, and has therefore endeavoured to cure it by several expedients; particularly by the mortification which the great adversary of mankind meets with upon his return to the assembly of infernal spirits, as it is described in a beautiful passage of the tenth book; and likewise by the vision, wherein *Adam* at the close of the Poem sees his off-spring triumphing over his great enemy, and himself restored to a happier *Paradise* than that from which he fell.

There is another objection against *Milton's* Fable, which is indeed almost the same with the former, though placed in a different light, namely, That the Hero in the *Paradise Lost* is unsuccessful, and by no means a match for his enemies. This gave occasion to Mr. *Dryden's* reflection, that the Devil was in reality *Milton's* Hero. I think I have obviated this objection in my first paper. The *Paradise Lost* is an Epic, or a Narrative Poem, and he that looks for an Hero in it, searches for that which *Milton* never intended; but if he will needs fix the name of an Hero upon any person in it, it is certainly the *Messiah* who is the Hero, both in the principal action, and in the chief Episodes. Paganism could not furnish out a real action for a Fable greater than that of the *Iliad* or *Aeneid*, and therefore an heathen could not form a higher notion of a Poem than one of that kind which they call an Heroic. Whether *Milton's* is not of a sublimer nature I will not presume to determine: It is sufficient, that I shew there is in the *Paradise Lost* all the Greatness of plan, Regularity of design, and Masterly beauties which we discover in *Homer* and *Virgil*.

I must in the next place observe, that *Milton* has interwoven in the texture of his Fable some particulars which do not seem to have probability enough for an Epic Poem, particularly in the actions which he ascribes to *Sin* and *Death*, and the picture which he draws of the *Limbo of Vanity*, with other passages in the second book. Such allegories rather favour of the spirit of *Spenser* and *Ariosto*, than of *Homer* and *Virgil*.

In the structure of his Poem he has likewise admitted of too many digressions. It is finely observed by *Aristotle*, that the author of an Heroic Poem should seldom speak himself, but throw as much of his work as he can into the mouths of those who are his principal Actors. *Aristo-*

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le has given no reason for this precept; but I presume it is because the mind of the Reader is more awed and elevated when he hears *Aeneas* or *Achilles* speak, than when *Virgil* or *Homer* talk in their own persons. Besides that assuming the character of an eminent man is apt to fire the imagination, and raise the Ideas of an author. *Tully* tells us, mentioning his dialogue of old age, in which *Cato* is the chief speaker, that upon a review of it he was agreeably imposed upon, and fancied that it was *Cato*, and not he himself, who uttered his thoughts on that subject.

If the Reader would be at the pains to see how the story of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* is delivered by those persons who act in it, he will be surpris'd to find how little in either of these Poems proceeds from the authors. *Milton* has, in the general disposition of his fable, very finely observed this great rule; inasmuch, that there is scarce a third part of it which comes from the Poet; the rest is spoken either by *Adam* and *Eve*, or by some good or evil spirit who is engaged either in their destruction or defence.

From what has been here observed, it appears that digressions are by no means to be allowed of in an Epic Poem. If the Poet, even in the ordinary course of his narration, should speak as little as possible, he should certainly never let his narration sleep for the sake of any reflections of his own. I have often observed, with a secret admiration, that the longest reflection in the *Aeneid* is in that passage of the tenth book, where *Turnus* is represented as dressing himself in the spoils of *Pallas*, whom he had slain. *Virgil* here lets his Fable stand still for the sake of the following remark. *How is the mind of man ignorant of Futurity, and unable to bear prosperous fortune with moderation? The time will come when Turnus shall wish that he had left the body of Pallas untouched, and curse the day on which he dressed himself in these spoils.* As the great event of the *Aeneid*, and the death of *Turnus*, whom *Aeneas* slew because he saw him adorned with the spoils of *Pallas*, turns upon this incident, *Virgil* went out of his way to make this reflection upon it, without which so small a circumstance might possibly have slipped out of his reader's memory. *Lucan*, who was an injudicious Poet, lets drop his story very frequently for the sake of his unnecessary digressions, or his *Diverticula*, as *Scaliger* calls them. If he gives us an account of the prodigies which preceded the civil war, he declaims upon the occasion, and shews how much happier it would be for man, if he did not feel his evil fortune before it comes to pass, and suffer not only by its real weight, but by the apprehension of it. *Milton's* complaint for his blindness, his Panegyric on marriage, his reflections on *Adam* and *Eve's* going naked, of the  
Angels

Angels eating, and several other passages in his poem, are liable to the same exception, though I must confess there is so great a beauty in these very Digressions, that I would not wish them out of his poem.

I have, in a former paper, spoken of the *Characters of Milton's Paradise Lost*, and declared my opinion, as to the Allegorical Persons who are introduced in it.

If we look into the *Sentiments*, I think they are sometimes defective under the following heads; First, as there are several of them too much Pointed, and some that degenerate even into Puns. Of this last kind, I am afraid is that in the first book, where speaking of the Pigmies, he calls them

—————*The small Infantry*  
*Warr'd on by Cranes*—————

Another Blemish that appears in some of his thoughts, is his frequent Allusion to heathen Fables, which are not certainly of a piece with the divine subject, of which he treats. I do not find fault with these Allusions, where the Poet himself represents them as Fabulous, as he does in some places, but where he mentions them as Truths and Matters of fact. The limits of my Paper will not give me leave to be particular in Instances of this kind: the Reader will easily remark them in his perusal of the poem.

A third fault in his *Sentiments*, is an unnecessary Ostentation of Learning, which likewise occurs very frequently. It is certain, that both *Homer* and *Virgil* were masters of all the learning of their times, but it shews itself in their works, after an indirect and concealed manner. *Milton* seems ambitious of letting us know, by his excursions on Free-will and Predestination, and his many glances upon History, Astronomy, Geography and the like, as well as by the terms and phrases he sometimes makes use of, that he was acquainted with the whole circle of Arts and Sciences.

If, in the last place, we consider the *Language* of this great Poet, we must allow what I have hinted in a former Paper, that it is often too much laboured, and sometimes obscured by old words, transpositions, and foreign Idioms. *Seneca's* objection to the Style of a great Author, *Riget ejus oratio, nihil in ea placidum, nihil lenè*, is what many Critics make to *Milton*: As I cannot wholly refute it, so I have already apologized for it in another Paper; to which I may further add, that *Milton's* *Sentiments* and Ideas were so wonderfully sublime, that it would have

been impossible for him to have represented them in their full strength and beauty, without having recourse to these foreign assistances. Our language sunk under him, and was unequal to that Greatness of Soul which furnished him with such glorious conceptions.

A second fault in his Language is, that he often affects a kind of Jingle in his words, as in the following passages, and many others :

*And brought into the World a World of woe.*

————— *Begirt th' Almighty throne*

*Beseeching or besieging*—————

*This tempted our Attempt*—————

*At one slight Bound high over-leapt all Bound.*

I know there are figures for this kind of speech, that some of the greatest Antients have been guilty of it, and that *Aristotle* himself has given it a place in his Rhetoric among the beauties of that Art. But as it is in self poor and trifling, it is I think at present universally exploded by all the Masters of polite writing.

The last fault which I shall take notice of in *Milton's* Stile, is the frequent use of what the Learned call *Technical Words*, or Terms of Art. It is one of the great beauties of Poetry, to make hard things intelligible, and to deliver what is abstruse of it self in such easy language as may be understood by ordinary Readers: Besides, that the knowledge of a Poet should rather seem born with him, or inspired, than drawn from books and systems. I have often wondered, how Mr. *Dryden* could translate a passage out of *Virgil*, after the following manner,

*Tack to the Larboard, and stand off to sea,*

*Veer Star-board sea and land.*—————

*Milton* makes use of *Larboard* in the same manner. When he is upon Building, he mentions *Doric Pillars, Pilasters, Cornice, Freeze, Architrave*. When he talks of heavenly Bodies, you meet with *Ecliptic*, and *Eccentric*, the *Trepidation*, *Stars dropping from the Zenith*, *Rays culminating from the Equator*. To which might be added many Instances of the like kind in several other Arts and Sciences.

I shall in my next papers give an account of the many particular Beauties in *Milton*, which would have been too long to insert under those general heads I have already treated of, and with which I intend to conclude this piece of Criticism.

Saturday,